

320



Colonel Henry A. Siegel



Ex Libris
JOHN AND MARTHA DANIELS

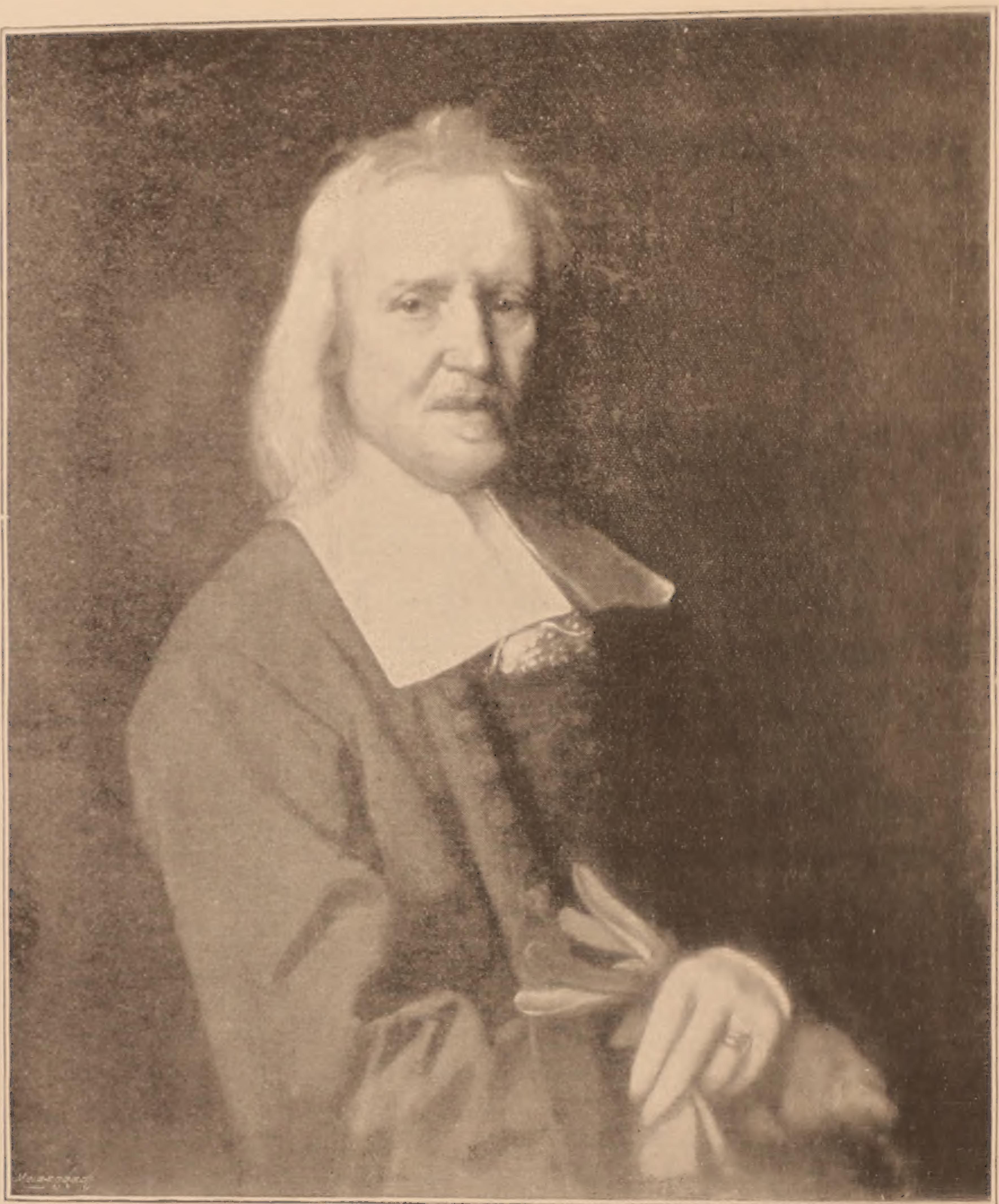
THE
TERCENTENARY OF
IZAAK WALTON.

THE IMPRESSION
OF THIS BOOK IS LIMITED TO A FEW COPIES
FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY.

in all of 30 copies printed
20 of which went to the principal & 10 to others



ISAACUS WALTON,
Pater Piscatorum
Ob^t 15 Dec^r 1683. Aet^r 90.



IZAAK WALTON.
After Huysman.

THE
TERCENTENARY
OF
IZAAK WALTON.

BY
ANDREW LANG.

London:
PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY.
1893.

THE TERCENTENARY
OF
IZAAK WALTON
BY
ANDREW LANG

ON August 9, three hundred years ago, Izaak Walton was born at Stafford. Of his first twenty years we know literally nothing at all; at twenty he was probably attached to the business of Henry Walton, a haberdasher in Whitechapel. As early as 1619 a poem was dedicated to Izaak, "The Love of Amos and Laura," by S. P. The dedication shows that Walton was himself already a versifier; nobody guessed that he was to be famous as a writer of prose, but as a poet, very far from glorious. Soon we find Walton engaged in the one delight which was as dear to him as angling, the society of the clergy. In 1624 Izaak dwelt in Fleet Street, two doors west of the end of Chancery Lane, and Dr. Donne was already Vicar of St. Dunstan's in the West. Through his poet-vicar, probably, Walton became the friend of Sir Henry Wotton, Hales of Eton, Dr. Henry King, and other pious and learned persons. He also knew Ben Jonson and the river-loving poet, Drayton. Together they may have fished the Lea; there was good fishing at Hackney then and long afterwards. In 1626 Walton married his first wife, Rachel Floud (a watery name); the lady was related to the family of Cranmer. In 1631 Donne died; Walton wrote his Life, and a eulogy in verse. In 1639 Wotton writes to Izaak "about the approaching time of the fly and the cork," and this is our earliest proof that Izaak was an angler. He was better with "the cork"—that is, the float—than the fly, being a confirmed bait-fisher. Nothing else not wholly to his credit is known of Walton. The best of men have their faults; bait-fishing was Izaak's "redeeming vice." In 1640 Mrs. Walton died; she and her husband had been tried by the loss of seven children. In 1644, he retired from business, and lived as best he could through "the decay of common honesty" that attended the Great Rebellion. His only comfort was that, at least, he was no Covenanter. In 1646 Walton married again, a Mistress Ken, a kinswoman of the Bishop's. His movements are now uncertain; probably he lived partly in Stafford, fishing Shawford Brook, which he mentions in a song, partly in London. After Worcester fight he carried a jewel of Charles II. to Colonel Blague, a Cavalier prisoner in the Tower, who made his escape, and restored the gem to the King. Ashmole tells the story, and says that Walton is "well beloved of all good men."

Among Izaak's writings he mentions the lives of Donne, Wotton, Hooker, and Herbert. Worcester fight was in 1651; in 1653, in his sixtieth year, Walton published his "Compleat Angler." Successive editions were altered and enlarged, but 1653 is the date of the little book for which such enormous sums are paid. No man censured it, save that robust salmon-fisher and Cromwellian trooper, Richard Franck. Writing in 1658, Franck calls Izaak's book "an undigested octavo,"

and Izaak a plagiarist. All good men have been called plagiarists. The truth is that Walton borrowed his fly-fishing lore, as he acknowledged, from Thomas Barker (1651), and that traditional ideas from Dame Juliana Berners occur in his work, just as ideas of Walton's occur in all the later angling literature down to our time. Franck once met Walton at Stafford, and attacked his fabulous doctrine that pickerel weed breeds pickerel. Walton "huffed away, which rendered him rather a formal opinionist than a reformed and practical artist." In truth, Walton was content with tradition and old authorities—Gesner, Dubravius, and Aldrovandus. Authority was his guiding star in Church, State, and angling. Franck was really a finished angler; he fished Scotland from the Esk to the Naver, and, as a Cromwellian, he naturally was of a



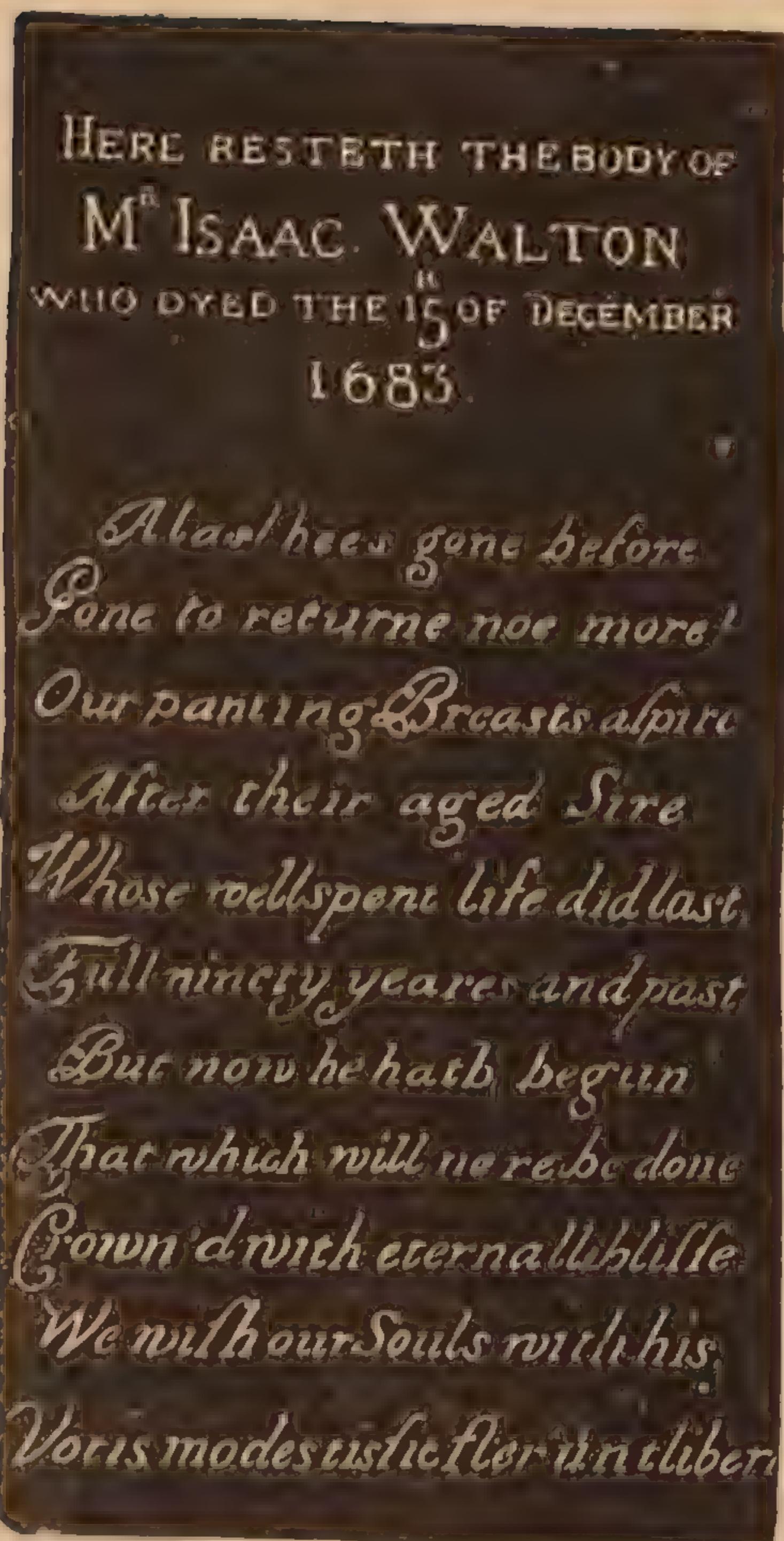
CHARLES COTTON, CO-EDITOR OF "THE COMPLEAT ANGLER."



OLD HOUSE IN EAST GATE STREET, STAFFORD.
Supposed to have been the house in which Izaak Walton was born.

radical turn, caring no more for Aldrovanus than for Laud. Franck wrote as ill as Walton wrote well; his dialogues, in "Northern Memoirs," are all dull pedantries, except when he comes to practice, and then we recognise a master. He has no nonsense about magical baits, but sticks to his Jock Scotts and Blue Doctors, though he does not give the flies their modern names.

The Restoration can have delighted no man more than honest Izaak. He flowed in loyal song, in an



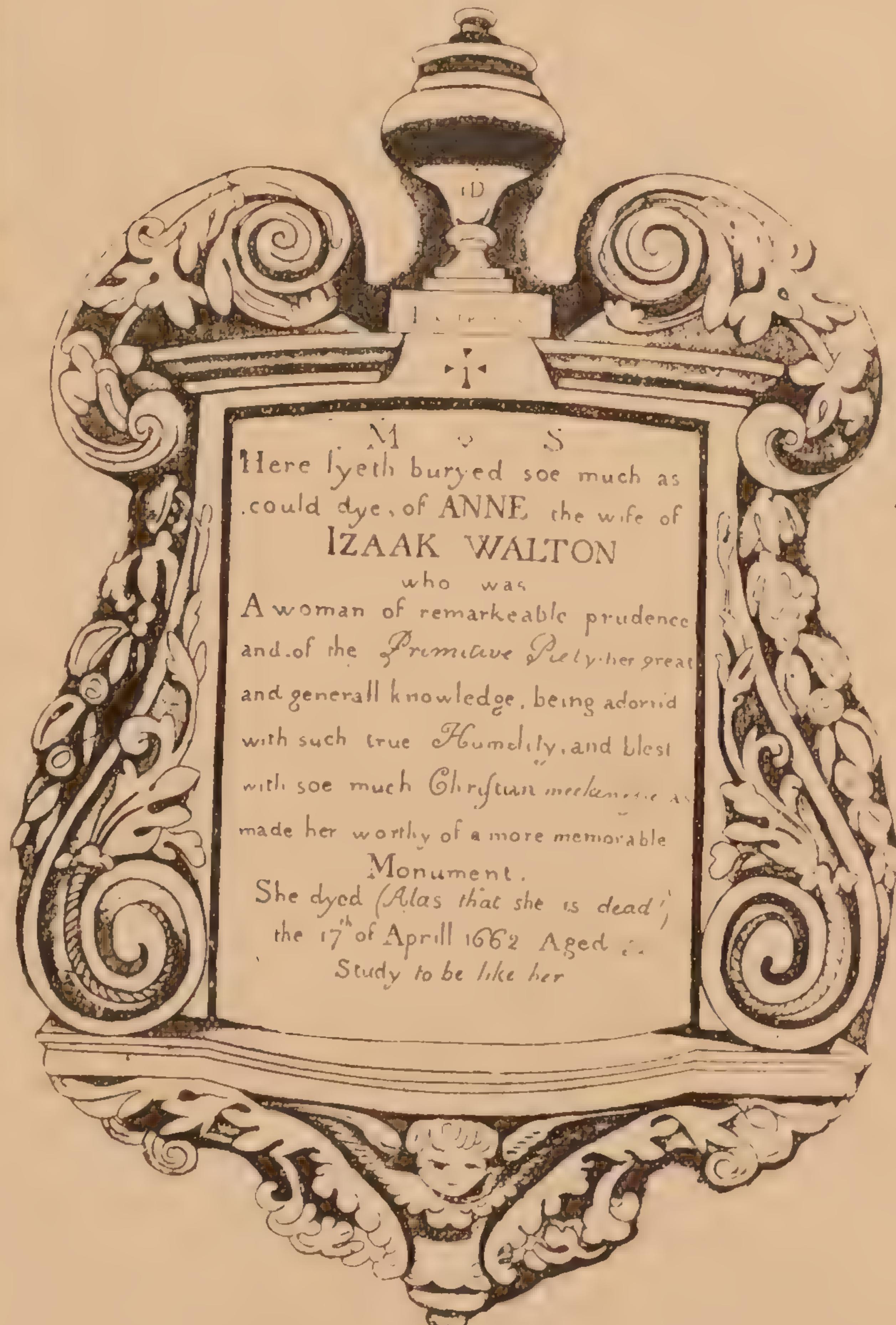
WALTON'S TOMBSTONE IN WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL.

Walton by Donne, our Lord crucified on the anchor of Hope. He died on December 15, 1683, and is buried in Winchester Cathedral.

A brief record of a long, charitable, kind and pious life seems the best way of contributing to the memory of Izaak Walton. His pastoral in prose has rarely been blamed, except by Byron and Franck. The charm of peace, content, goodwill to men; the love of green old England, where still the milkmaids sang, despite religious and political revolution, inform that delightful work, which is like a fragrant flower in the sternest chapter of English history. Say what men will of the Church and the Crown, Nonconformity and Republicanism have never produced, can never pro-

eclogue called "Damon and Doris." In 1662 his second wife died; soon after he withdrew to Winchester, to Bishop Morley's. There he wrote the "Life of Hooker," and no doubt he caught great trout—with worm, alas!—in the Itchen.

In 1672 Cotton wrote a poem to Walton, and himself, as an artist in fly-fishing, contributed a secondary treatise to "The Compleat Angler." This was in 1676; in the same year Cotton built his famous fishing house on the Dove, where his initials are interwoven with Walton's in a cypher. In 1683 Walton made his will at Winchester, leaving a sum to buy coals every year for the poor of Stafford, "at the time the hardest and most pinching for poor people," the end of January. The will is sealed with the ring given to



MRS. WALTON'S TOMBSTONE.

THE TERCENTENARY OF IZAAK WALTON.



Walton and Collyns
Fish & Hause
Bereford Dale.

duce, a treasure like "The Compleat Angler." A quiet mind had, in those days, its own paradise of content, whither it could withdraw and be in charity with the world. Walton lives with Bunyan, a character as gentle and loving as his own, but trained in another school. Walton by the Itchen is not more at ease in his heart and at peace with men than Bunyan in his prison at Bedford. But Walton had never known doubt, or stress of soul, or fear concerning the destiny which is in the hands of God. All these things had been familiar to Bunyan, and he had overcome them all. By waters more peaceful than Shawford Brook these kindred souls, on earth divided, may have met ere now, and known each other for brethren in goodness and charity. The strife of their times may have severed their sympathies on earth; in heaven they know how all things are reconciled in love.



THE HOUSE WHERE IZAAK WALTON LIVED IN LONDON, AT THE WEST CORNER OF CHANCERY LANE.



Book; I do not know why, but probably to conciliate enlightened Liberal opinion. I saw a fellow selling oak badges in Oxford on May 29, and heard one undergraduate ask another the reason why. Perhaps the vendor himself did not know. Even in loyal Oxford, he alone, a shabby lad enough, seemed to keep in touch with tradition. Our feasts are rare enough, and very unlike Izaak's. Still, there is a certain loyalty of a new sort in commemorating his well-beloved and blameless name, which blossoms in the dust, sweet smelling after these three hundred years, that have altered well-nigh everything. On the whole, Izaak came just at the right time, despite the turmoil of the age. He would not have made a happy change, had he been born among us. Our angling literature is copious, practical, full of anecdote: Walton alone gave it style. He is not so much unrivalled as absolutely alone. Heaven meant him for the place he fills, as it meant the cowslip and the Mayfly. He wrote with love, and he wrote in leisure, not pursued about the land by printers' devils and proof-sheets. Some of his sweetest sentences—rich, musical, and melancholy—he is known to have meditated, and he practised writing them out in various

In Walton's time, of course, there were no tercentenaries — nothing of the kind. The Church's festivals were kept, except by Puritans, who could neither be led nor driven into enjoying themselves. There was the fast for the Royal Martyr, there was Oak-apple Day, and so forth. The fast has been dropped out of our Prayer



MONUMENT TO IZAAK WALTON IN ST. MARY'S CHURCH, STAFFORD.

Copy of Isaac Wallton
Register from St. Mary's Stafford Register.
September. 1593

J.W.

Baptizatus fuit I^r George filius Iacobus Wallon
88^{ys} que nō opis est anno 1593
per me Jo. Hanne CT^r Tay
uper forem 2^m

(Baptizatus fuit Isaac filius Jerosus Wallon,
die 1. Iulij anno 1593 Et anno predicto
Isaac Wallon baptizatus Isaac per me Johanna Pilkew
- etiam s. c. 1. 1. (obit) :

forms till he found perfection. In words he was an artist, and a careful artist, weighing syllables and adjusting ideas to their form. Yet he seems—that is the skill of his touch—to write with a flowing pen, without blotting a line. There is no appearance of research, no modern nice derangement of epithets about his manner. The authors of England owe him praise no less than the anglers. His book reminds us that even the anglers of the Restoration were men with ears for the music of words; that in these days, a book, even about a sport, was literature. Of Walton nobody has compiled, as in Shakspere's case, a "Century of Praise." When did his readers awake to the knowledge that in Walton we have a Master? Industrious research might discover the history of Walton's rise to eminence. It all is here, by way of a Theocritus, though he writes in prose. Perhaps histories of literature cannot tell us how he and Sir Thomas Browne acquired their styles, such styles as a changed world shall not see again. As Charles V. said of Florence, they are too beautiful to be looked at except on holidays; too good for workaday hours. The best way of commemorating Walton is not by statues and speeches but by being of his temper, and by reading him. But that is perhaps the last honour which the world pays to an old author.



Being a Discourse of
FISH and FISHING,
Not unworthy the perusal of most Anglers

Simon Peter said, I go a fishing and they said, We also will go with thee. John 21:3.

London, Printed by T. Hauxey for Rich MARIOT, in
S. Dunstans Church-Yard, Fleet Street, 1653.

FACSIMILE OF THE TITLE PAGE OF THE FIRST EDITION
OF THE "COMPLEAT ANGLER"

